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Diplomats say Soviet U.N. staff finances spying

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WASHINGTON — Soviet spying in the United States is being financed in part with American dollars obtained through salary kickbacks from Soviets employed by the United Nations Secretariat, according to diplomats, defectors and U.S. intelligence reports.

Those familiar with the kickback scheme say it has been going on for years and also involves U.N. employees from other Eastern Bloc countries.

It is estimated that the kickbacks totaled about \$20 million last year. About one-quarter of that came from the United States, which provides roughly 25 percent of the United Nations' operating funds.

It is unclear exactly what proportion of the kickbacks is used for spying, but a Senate Intelligence Committee report prepared last year says that "it is a major subsidy for Soviet diplomatic and intelligence efforts."

Under the kickback scheme, Soviet and Eastern Bloc nationals employed by the secretariat — the organization's vast administrative body — are paid directly by the United Nations in U.S. dollars. According to numerous accounts, these employees are required to remit their salaries to their respective governments, which then pay them a lesser amount typically based on a much lower wage scale used for their diplomats.

Salaries for U.N. Secretariat employees are relatively high because of the high cost of living — especially for housing — in New York. But many Soviets assigned to the secretariat reside in a Soviet compound in the Riverdale section of the Bronx, greatly reducing their living expenses.

In addition to salary kickbacks, the CIA and FBI have concluded, Soviet employees who have paid into the U.N.'s pension fund also are required to withdraw their total contributions when they leave their secretariat jobs. That money is then turned over to their government.

The kickback practices have been "pretty well confirmed by virtually all of the defectors we have interviewed," said Charles M. Lichtenstein, who was U.S. assistant ambassador to the United Nations when he resigned in 1984. "The FBI has a massive amount of information on this."

In a letter to United Nations Secretary-General Javier Perez de Cuellar last February, American U.N. Ambassador Vernon A. Walters termed the kickback scheme "unacceptable" and asked him to "initiate actions to end them."

But a spokesman for the secretary-general said this week that the secretary-general is powerless to stop the practice.

"We have not acknowledged" the practice, said spokesman Joe Sills, "because what happens to the paychecks of the staff members once we issue them is beyond our control."

If there is a kickback scheme, he said, "then this is something that should be a problem between the U.S. and the Soviet Union."

According to State Department figures for 1985, there were 588 Soviets and Eastern Europeans assigned to the U.N. Secretariat. Those employees obtained their jobs through a quota system under which member countries essentially grant their diplomats an extended leave of absence to fill secretariat positions.

The secretariat employees function as international civil servants and take an oath "not to seek or accept instructions in regard to the performance of my duties from any government or other authority external to the organization."

Anatoly Khudiakov, a spokesman for the Soviet Union's U.N. Mission in New York, said he was unaware of the alleged kickbacks.

But the FBI, CIA and Soviet defectors to the West all contend that many of the secretariat's Soviet or Eastern European employees actually use their jobs primarily for spying. And, they say, the vast majority of them are required to kick back part of their salary.

In an interview, Mr. Lichtenstein said it was difficult to determine how much of the money earned through kickbacks goes for spying. "But it's a very large and very valuable reservoir of hard currency which gives them the kind of pool they need for intelligence operations," he said.

Mr. Lichtenstein said the kickback operation by other Eastern Bloc countries is "roughly comparable, but it would vary from mission to mission, and some of them are obviously stricter than others."

"It is my understanding that the Bulgarians are closest to the Soviets in this regard," he said.

The kickbacks have raised the ire of some members of Congress, who are demanding that U.S. contributions to the United Nations be cut as punishment.

Two Republican congressmen, Pat Swindall of Georgia and Don Sundquist of Tennessee, have included language in a congressional spending bill that would trim close to \$1 million in U.S. contributions to the United Nations. The reduction has been approved by both chambers and is part of a bill now being debated by a House-Senate conference committee.

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